

An incubation

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However turbulent the four years at Swarthmore might have been, individual events have drifted almost out of memory. College now comes to mind as one large, amorphous blob of recollection. After some all-too-infrequent back-looking, I was shocked to discover that my own time at Swarthmore could really best be described as an incubation. I was a rather embryonic animal in 1933, and I suspect that a fair proportion of my classmates fell into the same category. In retrospect, I must thank the College for furnishing just the right intellectual challenge, just enough social activity, and a set of peers and teachers who were sufficiently bright, brash, and even occasionally cold-blooded to allow the egg to hatch without crushing it, shell and all.

Swarthmore became a reality only after graduation, when the formerly unappreciated impact of our college environment became obvious. The Honors program, with its emphasis on a fair degree of self-reliance and its excellent didactic content, made graduate study relatively clear sailing. Perhaps most important was the influence of the intellectually cosmopolitan student body. A classmate of mine (a Social Science type) frequently

enjoyed pointing out that whereas he and his colleagues soaked up *The Atlantic* and *The New Republic* like comic books, chemists and engineers generally wallowed in *Liberty* magazine except for occasional flights into the stratosphere of *Collier's*.

Although his remarks were undoubtedly meant to be biting, he really came quite close to hitting the nail on the head. Most of us who majored in the natural or exact sciences were, verbally and socially, a pretty incoherent and clumsy lot, and the glibness and glitter of the Humanities bunch frequently made us feel uncomfortably drab. I would imagine that our superficially more graceful colleagues must also have been driven to a certain degree of self-examination by the occasional penetration of a minor pearl of scientific logic, albeit uttered in sentences of limited complexity. The process of discovering the world of nuance was continuous and cumulative, and we were fortunate that it was ever so much more gentle than, for example, the sort of exposure that students in the fancier British universities receive.

I have belabored the matter of extracurricular mind sharpening because I feel that, although many colleges could equal Swarthmore in academic excellence (perhaps I should add "in the thirties"), few could offer as strong a tradition of, and respect for, scholarliness. Furthermore, the

student body automatically assumed this attitude. It really was very difficult not to develop some appreciation of the Leonardo da Vinci "complete man" idea, unpromising though we were as raw material.